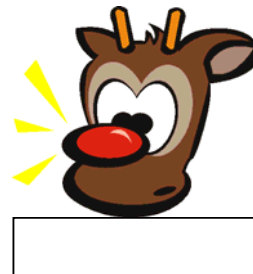


RUDOLPH ISN'T THE ONLY ONE WITH A RED NOSE IN WINTER

What a wonderful time of year! The “Boo’s” are gone, the “Gobbles” are over, and the magic of the holiday season is in the air.

Unfortunately for many children with asthma¹ or allergies, magic isn’t the only thing in the holiday air. Has your child been sneezing, coughing and wheezing? What you think is a cold may be an allergic reaction to your Christmas tree – real or artificial, holiday decorations, and other winter asthma and allergy triggers.



Common Holiday Asthma Triggers

Living or Cut Christmas Trees and Evergreen Decorations carry airborne pollens and molds; the drying branches may release these pollens and molds. Warmed and watered evergreen trees also release fragrant chemicals that can cause symptoms such as nasal congestion, wheezing and sneezing.

- To remove pollens, before you bring your tree indoors, spray it with a garden hose. Keep the tree stump in water while you let the branches dry thoroughly outside.
- Set the tree up late, and remove it early; keep it in water.

Artificial Christmas Trees, Lights and Ornaments can gather molds and dusts in storage.

- Wipe down your artificial tree with a damp cloth before setting it up in your house.
- Clean lights and ornaments to remove dust and mold.

Scented Candles, Potpourri, Perfumes, and Other Scented Products are also frequent asthma and allergy triggers.

- When buying decorations and presents, remember that as many as 20 percent of the people in your family and on your gift list may have allergies. It is better to avoid highly scented products.
- Candles can also be a source of lead-exposure for your child. If you burn candles, make sure that the wick is lead-free.



Smoke – Tobacco or Fireplace is a strong asthma trigger.

- If you smoke, please smoke outside, and make sure no one ever smokes around your child.
- Make the fireplace a decorative focus this winter. Place plants or other decorations in the fireplace opening. Both indoor air and outdoor air conditions will improve if we use our wood-burning fireplaces less.

Exposure to Cold and Flu Viruses increase with more public contact during shopping and visiting. Infections are a common asthma trigger.

- If your child has asthma, make sure your child gets a flu shot this season. Children with chronic health problems like asthma need the protection.
- It is very important to carefully follow your child’s asthma management plan even though it may be more difficult during the holidays.
- See that your child gets proper rest, and maintains a balanced diet.

Changes in Weather can trigger asthma attacks. Cold air tends to be low in moisture. This can cause the airways to become dry and narrow. Children with asthma need special care when exercising in cold weather.

- Your child may need to use asthma medication before exercising to avoid exercise-induced asthma attacks.
- Cover your child's mouth and nose with a loose-fitting mask or scarf during very cold weather. This will warm the air before it enters his/her airways.
- If the weather is very cold or there is a lot of air pollution, have your child stay indoors.

Stress is common during the holiday season both for parents and children. Stress can be a potent asthma trigger. For parents there is the budgeting and shopping for presents, and then facing those post-holiday bills. For children, there are changes in diet and routine that can be very stressful, especially for small children.

- For your extended family, try drawing names. This allows everyone to get a present, but cuts back on the costs and difficulty of finding presents for everyone.
- For young children, they are more interested in you. Make Christmas special for your child by spending the time you saved shopping for family presents with him/her. Bake cookies, read Christmas stories, drink a cup of hot chocolate, play in the snow.
- For grandparents and other family members, let your child make Christmas cards. They supply the art; you can help with the verse. A handprint or footprint is not only a simple decoration; it is a snapshot in time to be enjoyed year after year.
- Take care of yourself; your child depends on you.

Have a Happy and Healthy Holiday Season!

¹Asthma is a serious, chronic disease of the airways of the lungs. "Chronic" means that the disease is always present, even when your child feels good.

Article written by Jean Woodward, Asthma Coordinator, Idaho Indoor Air Program, Bureau of Environmental Health and Safety (BEHS), and is part of a continuing series provided by BEHS, Idaho Division of Health.